The Chronicle and Index

OF THE UNITARIAN SOCIETY.

No. 84, Vol. vii.] BELFAST, DECEMBER 1st, 1887. [For Gratuitous Circulation.

The Rev. J. C. Street acknowledges with thanks the receipt of the following contribution in aid of the gratuitous publication of the *Chronicle and Index*:—

A Friend, Bridport, £0 2 6

Further contributions are respectfully invited.

With the present number we close the seventh volume of this little periodical. Its publication has been attended with difficulties; but the little paper has had so friendly a reception that we are indisposed to let it "cease to be." This is a very good opportunity for friends to help us financially when we are about to enter upon our eighth year. A word to the generous is sufficient.

The Monthly Service for the teachers and scholars of Rosemary Street School took place on Sunday, November 13th. There was a good attendance. Mr. Bulmer read the service, and the address was delivered by the Rev. J. C. Street.

The Lectures at Rosemary Street Church, during the Sunday evenings in November, have been as follows:—

November 6—Rev. J. Kelly: "The Great Exemplar."

November 13—Rev. J. C. Street: "Sons of God."

November 20—Rev. J. C. Street: "Jesus, the Saint."

November 27—Rev. J. C. Street: "Jesus, the Prophet."

The attendances have been good, and the various topics treated have enlisted great attention.

We are very glad to hear that, by the death of Mr. Quinn, the resources of the Remonstrant Sustentation Fund will be augmented by the sum of £5,000, and that one or two of our congregations here are also substantially benefitted. The interest of this £5,000 will doubtless be employed in adding to the scant incomes of the ministers connected with the Remonstrant Body. It is a pity there is not a general Sustentation Fund, so that all the ministers of our churches might benefit thereby. Some day this will be so.

We are wanting a small troop of ministers to fill our pulpits in the North of Ireland. Raloo, Warrenpoint, Second Ballyclare, are all needing ministers, and it is said that Newry will also shortly be vacant. It seems not unlikely that other vacancies will shortly be declared; but there are enough for the present. Good men, who are very self-denying, and who can do much work for little pay are greatly needed.

The meetings of the Mutual Improvement Association during the month of November have been largely attended, and full of interest. On October 31st a most instructive discussion took place on the question, "Has the condition of the working classes improved during the past fifty years?" On November 7th, Mr. John Cuming read a valuable paper on "Green

and Orange," which called forth an animated discussion. On November 14th, the Rev. J. Rentoul, of Dromore, lectured in a most attractive way on "A bit of Coal," and kept up the interest of a large audience throughout a long and brilliant address. On November 21st, four brief Papers were read: (1) Mr. Gilliland on "Mazzini;" (2) Mr. Fisher on "My Holiday;" (3) Mr. Milligan on "Conscience;" and (4) Mr. Shone on "Othello." On November 28th, the Rev. J. A. Kelly delivered an admirable lecture on "Epitaphs." The month's proceedings were most attractive.

MR. SPURGEON can bear the strain no longer. He is so overpowered by the thought that the Baptist Union is on the "downward grade" that he has severed his connection with that body, and gone out into the wilderness to bear his testimony alone. He is too strong and popular a man to be left alone long, but his following can only be a small one, for he represents a theology which is dying a natural death. His effort to stem the tide of progress will have the same fate that has attended all such efforts in the past. No man, and no Church, can resist the spirit of the age, or prevent the growth of the world. Mr. Spurgeon notwithstanding, the Baptist body will broaden with the broadening world.

PRESIDENT ELIOT, of the United States, has been to the East, and he has seen Mahomedanism in its home. He declares that he was amazed at the dignity, reverence, and piety of the Moslem services in their mosques. He had no adequate conception of the enormous blessing which that religion had been to the region over which it so rapidly spread. Just so! As our knowledge increases our prejudices disappear. Men will soon begin to say that Peter was not far wrong when he said that "in every nation he that feareth God, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with Him," and that everywhere God's Spirit works with men, and brings them into holiest relations with Himself. Just as with Christianity, so with Mahomedanism—both are dialects in the universal language of Religion.

OUR readers will be pleased to know that the Rev. J. E. Stronge, of Kilbarchan, has received and accepted an invitation to succeed the Rev. W. Binns in the ministry at Birkenhead. The appointment is a good one, and we congratulate the congregation as well as Mr. Stronge.

HOW I LEFT ORTHODOXY.

BY JAMES C. STREET.

No. 3—*Continued.*

But some day comes when they cannot answer us, and we are startled, or they give us answers which strangely perplex and bewilder us, and we are puzzled, or their answers jar against some ideal or standard which seems gradually to have risen up within us, and we are driven into an unwilling but irresistible revolt. Now, already I had broken away from some of my teachers, but I had, so far, the feeling that in this one matter they were not in harmony with others whom I had been also led to honour and respect. It was possible there might be a harmony between them which I could not yet understand, and I felt at liberty to go with those whose ideas were most in sympathy with what I felt to be true. But they were all agreed about the Bible being an infallible standard, and they were also agreed that this standard taught the doctrine of an endless Hell. I cannot be said to have accepted in any clear and well-reasoned way their belief in this infallible standard, but neither did I even dream of doubting it. I was borne along with the stream. I was born and lived in the midst of the belief in it, and my acquiescence in it or acceptance of it was precisely the same as that of the Buddhists or Brahmans, or Mahomedans in their sacred books. None of them had thought anything about the matter, or had any opinions which were worth a moment's consideration. Such was certainly my own attitude towards this standard. I was in no revolt, and had no idea of revolting. Towards the second argument of my friends, that is in the affirmation that this standard taught the doctrine of an endless Hell, I found my attitude

insensibly changing. My eyes were opening to see some new things. Fresh light seemed to be breaking out of what we called "God's word," and I began to doubt whether my teachers were right. The moment this doubt arose in my mind I began to understand, as I had never understood before, that I myself must be dealt with in all matters of religion, that it was not enough that others had thought and decided, I also must think and decide. I did not wish to be hostile or fractious, but I felt that I must be satisfied. I began to feel and understand my own individuality, and to know that in future I must seek out and find out for myself what was truth and duty. I stood at the dividing point. Hitherto the stream had flowed in one channel—

> "That smiling left the mountain's brow,
> As though its waters ne'er would sever;
> Yet ere it reach the plains below,
> Breaks into floods that part for ever."—Moore.

I had to choose my path. For the first time I began to see that I must challenge the authority of my teachers. This is no easy position to occupy. To go with others is easy enough—the pathway is cheered by companionship; but to go alone, deliberately and sadly leaving those with whom we have journeyed hitherto, opens up a difficult and toilsome road, made all the more sad by the painful sense of loneliness. My controversy with my teachers about the teaching of the Bible respecting Hell arose in this wise.

Questions of Theology were frequently discussed in my presence, and many terms were occasionally used the full significance of which I did not understand. Still I was greatly interested, and I always listened eagerly. One of our little group was a man of singular modesty—shy as a young girl—but of great ability. He was a humble stocking-loom weaver, and probably never earned a pound a-week in his life. His lot was obscure. He lived in a densely-peopled neighbourhood, amid noisy, vulgar scenes, and surrounded by sights and sounds that warred against all refinement and culture. But those influences never seemed to touch him. Whether he even saw or felt them at all is doubtful. He walked among his fellows like one in a dream. He was always thinking. He was a born thinker and scholar, though I fancy he had few opportunities of ever being inside the walls of a school. But he was self-taught, and he was a deeply religious man. His favourite book was the Bible. He was wonderfully read in the Scriptures. To understand them the better he studied Greek and Hebrew, and preferred of late years to read the Scriptures in the original tongues. While he sat in his stocking-frame the Greek Testament would be at his side, with lexicon and concordance, and he would frequently stop to construe a passage, or hunt up a reference to throw light upon some thought passing in his mind. In all matters of theology he was profoundly interested. His studies had led him into Calvinism, and he was the real theologian of the party. But he was nevertheless an inquirer. He went to hear any prominent and scholarly preacher who visited the town. He never omitted visiting the halls where the Secularists or Atheists held forth. If one of their great champions came this man would be found in the audience. Sometimes there would be a public controversy, extending over many evenings; he would never be absent. Every winter the Unitarian minister of the town, the late Rev. Benjamin Carpenter of Nottingham, would deliver a course of six or eight lectures upon some points of theology. My friend was always a listener. He thought Mr. Carpenter the most learned man of the community, and always paid the greatest respect to his scholarship. At this time I did not know what Unitarianism was, and I had never seen Mr. Carpenter; but through this modest and appreciative listener it happened that I heard of both. Nothing would have induced this man to open his lips in public, and no lecturer or controversialist ever dreamed that in this quiet, heavy-looking listener there was so capable a critic, and so discriminating a judge. He could detect a fallacy in a moment, and could easily judge of the scholarly qualifications of a disputant or a lecturer. As a public man he was utterly unknown. But, in private,

with a small circle of thinking religious people about him, he would tell of what he had heard in debate or at a lecture; would refer to the authorities that had been cited, and would especially dwell upon any new interpretation he had heard of any passage of Scripture. It so happened that, owing to circumstances which I need not here set forth, I was brought very intimately into relationship with this man, and so had the opportunity of hearing much that he thought and much that he reported of other men's thinkings about Theology. From some conversations with him—many indeed, and extending over a long period—I was led to doubt as to the Bible's teachings about Hell. Not that he doubted. He did not. Not that he spoke about Hell, or its eternity; he did not. He simply accepted these things as indubitable verities, and did not spend much time over them. It was not in consequence of his talking or reasoning about Hell that I was led to doubt the infallibility of my teachers. But it was it consequence of what he said and reported about other matters. He was deeply interested in some controversies respecting the Atonement, and the rank of Christ, which, at this time, were not specially troubling my mind; while I was concerned about this terrible Hell question. I was in the darkness of night. The horror was almost unendurable, and I was eager to find some light. It broke out strangely enough from what my friend was thinking and arguing concerning the other topics to which I have referred. Let me explain. In a long discussion which had taken place about the efficacy and extent of the Atonement one passage was cited again and again. It was this, "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." (1 Cor. xv. 22.) Most ingeniously was this passage treated both by Methodists and Calvinists, and it always seemed to me that they were driven to very unnatural interpretations to make it square with their systems. I found that others outside these churches pressed it to conclusions far apart from theirs, and affirmed that it held out a prospect of hope even for the sinful and lost. This passage got hold of me. It was like a torch in the darkness of my night. But fresh brightness came from another source. A great topic of discussion in my young days, much greater than it is now, was the office, rank, and position of Christ. In every way was this subject considered. It cropped up when the doctrine of the Trinity was discussed, it was forced to the front when the humanity of Jesus was in question, and when the range and value of the Atonement was in debate it could not be ignored. I have already said that I was confused, as my friends and all about me seemed to be confused, about the way in which God and Christ were spoken of—sometimes as though they were one being—sometimes as quite distinct from one another; but the general understanding was that whatever the official names or offices might be, in essence, spirit, power, and being they were one. And yet the rumours of controversy broke in upon these theologians. The Unitarian minister in his lectures sometimes cited passages of scripture, and gave interpretations of them which drove my friends to look to their defences. One of these passages awoke eager controversy. By the Unitarians it was contended that whatever the rank or office of Christ, there came a time when it ceased, and when he himself sank into a position of inferiority and submission. This was the passage: "Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the Kingdom to God, even the Father: when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign till he hath put all things under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is Death. For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith all things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him. And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the son also himself be subject unto Him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all." (1 Cor. xv. 24—27.) Now these two passages—there were others of a similar nature—stood out in conspicuous grandeur, and were cited for purposes of controversy in matters which at that time I felt but a secondary concern about; but they

seemed to me to have a direct and powerful bearing upon a matter which was shaking my nature to its very centre. I mean the truth or falsehood of the doctrine of an eternal Hell. Weapons that were used for one purpose proved to be powerful for another. Shots in a battle oft-times strike down those who are not aimed at. In controversies, arguments and illustrations frequently fly far beyond the aim and intent of the disputants. So it was with regard to the discussions I have mentioned. Here I found within the great arsenal itself weapons with which to war against Hell. I know well enough that there were many passages in the Scriptures, and especially in the New Testament, and words spoken by Jesus himself, which set forth this dreadful Hell, and I was so bound up in the letter of the Bible that I could not, dare not doubt; but when I found within the same book passages which opened out the possibility of a different meaning to the dreadful words than that usually given, I was all on fire to study them closely, and press out of them their real nature and meaning. For the time being I cared little about the Atonement, the rank of Christ, or the infallibility of my teachers. I cared only to discover whether there was not some possible mistake about this dogma of Hell. What, then, did these words mean? I had been led to believe that in Adam all *died*. I am not sure that I understood what was meant by death here, but I took it to mean that because Adam sinned we were all lost. What, then, did the passage mean—"so in Christ shall *all* be made alive?" Life was set in contradistinction to death, the *dead* were to *live*, and as *all* were dead, so *all* were to be *alive*. The conclusion that seemed forced upon me took my breath. What a stupendous issue was raised! And then when I found that "the last enemy that was to be destroyed was death," and that when death was destroyed "the Son should be subject to God even the Father, that God might be All in All," it seemed to me that whatever else these passages could mean, or be made to signify, they left no room for an eternal Hell. My darkness was penetrated by a new light. I bore my torch aloft. I carried my discovery with me wherever I went. I pressed the conclusion at which I had arrived that the Bible was not altogether in favour of Hell upon my friends. Their thoughts were turned in other directions. Different controversies were interesting them, and they either contented themselves with shaking their heads solemnly at me, or with quoting some passage about "eternal damnation," which served for a time to scare me once again.

But again and again I recurred to those passages, and I turned them over in every light I could think of. I was quite sensible that there were many other passages which taught a precisely opposite thing, and therefore I dare not be confident. I could only hope. But this contrariety in the language and teaching of the Bible startled me in a new way. I had already concluded that my teachers were not infallible—was it possible that the Bible itself was not infallible? At times this thought rose up in my mind, but I drove it out as we would drive out an enemy from our gates. I dare not entertain it. And yet the thought came again and again—always to be fought, but always making itself felt. The day was coming when floods of light would stream over me respecting this, and when I should no longer drive the thought from me as though it were an enemy to my peace and to truth. But that time was not just yet. Now I comforted myself with the thought that there were portions of God's word that more than threw a doubt upon the dogma of Hell, and it seemed fairly open to question whether people who believed in Hell might not have misunderstood the Bible, and whether beneath the strong language of some of its passages there were not meanings which hitherto had been hidden from them. This step I promptly took. I said to myself, "no one can prove that the Bible really teaches an eternal Hell; there are passages in it which cannot bear that interpretation, and I can no longer accept it as being indubitably established by Holy Scripture." If the Bible was to be the Court of Appeal then I contended that its decision was not given in precise and definite terms, and that the matter was really left

undecided. This mental attitude could not long be maintained. I soon found that I could not stand there. I examined again and again the passages that seemed to affirm the dogma against which my whole nature revolted, and one by one they gave way, until only a few remained that I could not deal with. There they stood, grim, gloomy, defiant, like hostile fortresses, and every sentence was like the harsh clang of a dungeon gate. What was I to do with them? Were they to dominate me? Were they to cut out the life and hope I had found in the passages, "that *all* should be made alive," "that death should be subdued," and that "God should be all in all?" I had to balance these words with their far-reaching conclusions, and all the natural feelings of my heart, and all the higher views I was forming about the goodness, the mercy, and the love of God, against a few hard, ugly, terrible passages which were found in the Bible. Was the good, the lovely, the merciful *true*, or was the bad, the brutal, the revengeful *true?* This issue was definitely before me. There was more involved in it than I knew. It went to the root of many a question of authority, but it pressed upon me at this time only in its relation to the one topic that filled my mind. I found myself in the position that I had to make a *choice*. There was to me no longer any uniformity in the teachings of the Bible on this awful topic. Neither I nor anyone else was entitled to say that the oracle spoke clearly and with one voice. Running through the Book—as I then called it—there were distinctly two teachings—one which led to immortal *Despair*, and one to immortal *Hope*. I could not believe both. One destroyed the other. I had to choose between them. This placed me in a new and strange position. Another tribunal began to be dimly seen, more august, and more majestic than any outward tribunal whatever, and it was found within my own nature. I found that I had to carry before it not only the teachings of my instructors, but also the teachings of the Bible. For the first time I realized that I had to sit in judgment upon what I had been taught to believe was the "Word of God." And this was forced upon me by the discovery that the Bible did not speak clearly on this great theme of the future of souls. I did not as yet understand how far this was going to lead me, and how much was involved in the exercise of my own judgment about the Bible; but I was constrained to go on. I did not "ask to see the distant scene." "*One* step was enough for me." I cannot say that at this time I gave up utterly the belief in the infallibility of the Bible—that came later on, after other evidence had poured in upon me—but I certainly found in it a lack of clearness, definiteness, and authority where above all things those qualities were required; and I found that I had to go outside its covers to find a tribunal which would enable me to come to a decision upon the matter. To this tribunal I went.

My early teachings had led me to fear, if not to believe, that God had predestined some of his children to the pains and sorrows of an everlasting Hell; by a mighty revulsion of feeling I gave up this. I actually shuddered away from it; it was frightfully unjust, it gave no chance to man, it made God into a remorseless Tyrant. I cast it from me as I would cast away a burning brand, or a poisonous reptile. I thought better of God.

Next I saw God giving to every one a chance—offering salvation, pleading, entreating, but defeated by man's perversity and the Devil's hostility. There was a higher sense of justice here, but I felt that the power of God was not equal to His benevolence, and I was left as before, face to face with the horror of Hell, though I saw God was willing enough to close its dread portals. I could not rest here. All seemed so bungling, and so sad.

(To be continued).

"No Church performs its duty to the young that fails to raise the fundamental subject of sex into its proper human level. It is bound to rouse every young man and woman of its congregation to the perception that respect for the principle of sex, with fidelity to purity, is a fundamental condition of religious life." From *The Moral Education of the Young in Relation to Sex*." By Dr. ELIZABETH BLACKWELL.

Rosemary Street Mutual Improvement Association.

SIXTEENTH SESSION, 1887-88.

The Committee have the pleasure of announcing the following

PROGRAMME UNTIL CHRISTMAS 1887.

1887.
Dec. 5— "The Resources of Civilization," .. .. Mons. Dubois.
„ 12— "Some Thoughts on Atheism," .. .. .. Mr. W. J. Sloane.
„ 19— Music and Readings, .. Members and Friends.

The Meetings are held on MONDAY EVENINGS at Eight o'clock, in the Rosemary Street Schools.

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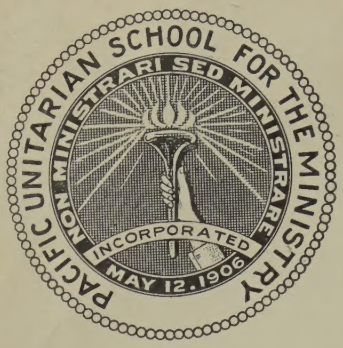

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